

**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE DENTAL ASSOCIATION**  
**Regarding S.B. 1135: An Act Establishing a Sustainable Path of Maintaining the Budget**  
**Reserve Fund and Reducing the Effect of Revenue Volatility on the State Budget**  
**Dr. Jeffrey Berkley, President**  
**Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee**  
**April 23, 2015**

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger, and distinguished members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Dr. Jeffrey Berkley, and I am currently the President of the Connecticut State Dental Association. I am an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon who participates with the Medicaid Program. My single specialty group practice consists of eight surgeons that practice in five offices throughout Connecticut. I am an attending in the Department of Dentistry at Yale, teaching in their residency program, and I am head of the Dental Department at Midstate Medical Center. My testimony today, on **SB 1135 An Act Establishing a Sustainable Path for Maintaining the Budget Reserve Fund and Reducing the Effect of the Revenue Volatility on the State Budget** is forwarded on behalf of the 2,550 members of the Connecticut State Dental Association, and more importantly, the citizens of Connecticut who rely upon our members for dental services through HUSKY dental Medicaid.

We understand the difficult decisions that the legislature will make in order to balance the biennial budget. However, to make 5.6% across the board cuts in dental Medicaid reimbursement rates is penny-wise and pound foolish. While our Association is strongly opposed to these cuts, we recognize the need for additional revenue, and therefore have provided the Committee with an option to increase revenue that is appropriate and necessary.

Over the past seven years, Connecticut's dental Medicaid program has gone from one of the worst performing programs in the country to a national example, with many other states trying to emulate the program. Members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee may recall the lawsuit settled in 2008 that enacted sweeping dental Medicaid reform. Prior to that settlement, only 125 dentists were providing any significant amount of care to those enrolled in the HUSKY program. Because there were so few dentists accepting Medicaid, children and adults on HUSKY were unable to receive needed dental care, and utilization was low.

Upon settlement of that lawsuit, dental Medicaid reimbursements were increased, and more dentists enrolled as Medicaid providers. Today, more than 2,000 dentists are active participants in the program, and ***utilization of services by Medicaid children is higher than national utilization rates for private insurance. Due to the success of the dental HUSKY program, we are seeing an increase in preventive care while***

**restorative procedures such as fillings and crowns are decreasing.** This means that we are able to help prevent suffering and more costly dental repairs. Without adequate access to care, more children will go without necessary dental treatment. As a kid, it's hard to focus on your studies and to be a productive learner when you have dental pain, and it has been shown that untreated dental cavities in children is a primary reason for lost school days.

To be clear, any form of reduction to dental Medicaid reimbursement rates will erode the successful program that exists today, impacting the ability of Connecticut's poorest residents to access dental care, and would ultimately cost the state more money elsewhere.

Without an adequate provider network, many Connecticut citizens will be forced to seek emergency care for oral conditions in local hospitals, where the cost of dental care can exceed **ten times the cost of care in a private dental office**, and more often than not, Emergency Room care for dental issues is not definitive. It is not in Connecticut's best fiscal interest to cut the adult dental Medicaid funding as it will only increase the cost to the state on the medical side of the equation. This is not a prudent way for families to manage their own budgets – save some money now, but pay even more later – nor is it a prudent way for the State to balance its budget

In 2008 the legislature challenged the dentists to step up to the plate to care for HUSKY clients. In turn, the legislature was brave, did the right thing, and by increasing reimbursement rates, made a promise to low income families that dental care would be provided to them. The success of the dental Medicaid program in Connecticut today is a testament to what can happen when the government and private providers work together to do the right thing.

Now is **not** the time for the State to break its promise to the poorest citizens of our State, or to the dental providers that those citizens rely upon for needed dental care. The legislature must find ways to maintain current dental Medicaid reimbursement rates. Anything less will result in the erosion of the provider network that was so vital to Connecticut's success, a program which is now an example for the rest of the country.

While the suggestion of increasing taxes is never a pleasant conversation, **the CSDA believes that increasing the cigarette tax is an appropriate and necessary revenue stream that will also improve public health.** As reported by the Connecticut Voices for Children (*Funding our Future*, March, 2015) 70 percent of voters in 2013 supported raising the cigarette tax. Furthermore, **an increase of 95 cents per pack would generate an estimated \$60 million in revenue**, while serving as another incentive for smokers to "kick the habit".

On behalf of the 2,550 members of the CSDA, thank you for providing me the opportunity to comment on this very important issue.